

Welcome to the NOVIR newsletter 2018.

This is the fourth time the newsletter is produced in English to make sure that we all have access to the same information. The decision to make NOVIR network's common language English was taken on the NOVIR seminar in Stockholm in 2014.

The transition to using English will of course require that we use the time to translate the materials, stories and news, we each want to share. We are glad that you had taken this time.

The newsletter 2018 is produced with the theme: **Tactile Reading – Braille and graphics**. Each country has read the publication "Elever med punktskrift som läsmedium" from SPSM and reflected upon it in relation to the work in their country and the challenges in this regards. Each country have then written shortly about the reflections.

Link to the publication: https://webbutiken.spsm.se/elever-med-punktskrift-som-lasme-dium/

In addition, each country has written a short description about 'the on-going and completed projects' in each organization.

I thank you for all the contributions made by the Nordic visual staff.

The information's in this newsletter is compiled by Lea Johanne Sarfelt, editor of the NOVIR newsletter.

Read more about NOVIR on www.novir.net

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Content

Finland	3
Braille Greetings from Finland	3
Norway	4
The on-going and completed projects in Norway	4
Children who will be learning braille: Early intervention for braille literacy in th kindergarten. An ongoing project.	
Learning environment and inclusion of persons with visual impairment (VI): An project	
Tactile Reading – conference in 2021	6
Sweden	6
Students with Braille as reading media – general guidelines for school organizers a headmasters	
The on-going and completed projects in Sweden	7
Doctoral Thesis in Special Education	7
Project Teach CVI	8
Denmark	8
Reflections on the Swedish publication, "Elever med punktskrift som läsmedium	8
Children Braille literacy in Denmark	9
Pre Braille – the early effort	9
Braille and the start of school	10
Braille and the education of teachers	10
The use of Braille in Synscenter Refsnæs	10
Braille and accessible materials	11
Biblus - a digital school library	11
A National course description form The National Board and Social Services	12
The use of Braille on IBOS	13
The on-going and completed projects in Denmark	13
Research in the effects of Neuro Technology Training	13
Danish Pre-employment Program, PEP	14
Booklet about nervousness at ADL and O&M	
Podcasts	15
IBOS' conferences in Denmark	15

Finland

Braille Greetings from Finland

Written by Consulting Teachers Tuija Piili-Jokinen and Riitta Kangasaho, Valteri Centre for Learning and Consulting, Onerva Unit, Jyväskylä.

It would seem that in many countries, the teaching of braille readers has a common goal, a thread that guides our work towards comprehensively supporting the school path of the pupil.

In Finland, there has recently been a lot of debate about the schooling and measures in support of the braille readers. In everyday schoolwork, we stress the importance of an educated teacher and a special need assistant who are able to guide and teach techniques regarding visual disability. The courses concerning the teaching of the visually impaired are organized by Valteri Centre for Learning and Consulting for the teachers and the assistants of the pupils. The courses offer introduction to the following issues:

- supporting social skills it is important that the pupil has a feeling that he/she is as important part of the class as any other classmate
- understanding the appropriate learning environment for the braille reader
- understanding the learning techniques that are suitable for the pupil and applying them in teaching
- using the instruments necessary in the school work
- the functionality of the learning material in teaching
- using different sensory modalities in teaching
- using both hands actively in different situations
- examining things and objects with hands, understanding the principles of both tactile reading of pictures (examining embossed writing and raised maps by hands) and audio description (verbally describing visual information)
- guiding the pupil to braille reading and using braille in teaching
- raising awareness and helping the classmates to understand for example braille and the instruments the pupil is using

In the future, due to the principles of equality and accessibility, audio description and using different sensory modalities should be highlighted in the teaching of the visually impaired pupils.

In order for the pupil to become a full member of the society, he/she will require constant support in school considering social skills, moving independently and personal self-care, in addition to academic skills.

Furthermore, what is needed for the braille reader to have a successful and a supported school path, is understanding by the education authority of the home municipality. As well as courage to make decisions that support the schooling of the pupil (the decisions are guided by law) that enable, the resources needed in every situation for the braille reader to study in his/her neighbourhood school.

Norway

The on-going and completed projects in Norway

Children who will be learning braille: Early intervention for braille literacy in the kindergarten. An ongoing project.

New approaches to stimulation and preparation for reading braille are being introduced, and we are constantly getting new digital aids and tools. Stimulation for written language and digital competence has also been more relevant for sighted children in kindergarten in Norway during the last years. Our experience shows us that it is necessary to enhance our methods regarding how to stimulate emergent literacy in kindergarten. This was the background for designing a research project intending to build new knowledge for braille stimulation, including digital competence.

The aims of the project:

- To structure the work Statped is doing for children attending kindergarten who will be learning braille.
- That future braille readers should receive equal stimulation of written language as sighted children in kindergarten.
- To enhance competence in written language stimulation in the child's network, within Statped and amongst other professionals working with the visually impaired.

Participants and project period

The target group is children aged 2-6 in Norwegian kindergartens who are intended to be braille readers in the future.

Project period is 01.01.2018 - 31.12.2020.

Data collection and project activities

Data is collected from a questionnaire to the staff working with each child. The staff participate in a semi-structured interview focusing on activities already established in their kindergarten, and their needs of competence and support in various braille activities. During their participation in the project, the staff complete logs describing braille activities approximately two times each month.

When the project starts in a kindergarten, a local course is held for the staff around the child and the parents. At the local course, we present materials and methods relevant for the child, and we collaborate about priorities of activities, which are relevant to concentrate. Activities for braille, inclusion and interaction with sighted children are central topics in the local course and in the counselling during the project period.

Project organization

This is a research project governed by the Department of Visual Impairment, Statped, in the southeast region of Norway. It is a national project where all the four regions in Statped participate in various extend. Gro E. Aasen, Silje Benonisen and Astrid K. Vik lead the project

Financial support

Statped mainly finances the project. We have also financial support from a research fund run by the Norwegian Association of the Blind and Partially Sighted.

Learning environment and inclusion of persons with visual impairment (VI): An ongoing project

This is a two years project, which started in September 2017. The project is financed through "Extrastiftelsen", which is a foundation that helps to realize projects that promote physical and mental health. Collaboration partner for Statped is the Norwegian Association of the Blind and partially sighted.

The objective is to create a web resource for anyone involved in working with, or for, children and adolescents with visual impairment. Through text, video and interviews, examples of good activities and training situations, universal design and good organization in kindergarten, school, work, home and leisure time, will be presented. The structure will ensure that anyone can search for information that are relevant for his or her specific area of interest.

The background for the project is the need for easy-accessible information about the visually impaired, and the challenges they are facing. As we see it, mastery in school, education and in social arenas is important for participating in meaningful activities, and at a later stage being attractive in the job market. As some young people with VI get exemption from some subjects at school, they are deprived of opportunities for higher education. In addition, one sees that the number of pupils who receive instruction outside the ordinary classroom increases, especially for students with visual impairment and additional problems. This creates exclusion, and several studies indicate a clear connection between being included in school and the number of friends in leisure time. Too many adolescents with visual impairment also say they have been bullied, which often occur on arenas outside the classroom.

The project is based upon participation from:

- children and adolescents with VI and/or their parents/guardians,

- educators/ advisors in kindergarten and school, and
- (Pre) school leaders with experience from organizing and facilitating visually impaired people.

By gathering information through a series of interviews, we hope to pinpoint areas of outmost importance for inclusion of persons with VI.

It is assumed that the online resource meets the universal design requirement and is available to anyone who wants access. The website will be available (in Norwegian) during late autumn 2019.

Tactile Reading - conference in 2021

In 2021, Statped will host the international conference Tactile Reading. Tactile Reading is a conference, which focuses on Braille/tactile reading, research and practice. This will be the second time this conference is arranged. The first time was in Stockholm in 2017. Statped will follow up ideas from the conference in Stockholm, and a program committee will be established in collaboration with partners in Norway and Sweden. Tactile reading 2021 will take place in Oslo (or near Oslo) and will last for two days. More information will follow in next year's newsletter.

Sweden

Students with Braille as reading media – general guidelines for school organizers and headmasters

SPSM, received in 2014, a special commission from the department of education to develop general guidelines with the goal to increase the students' results in different school subjects. In Sweden, an agency may issue general guidelines within its area of responsibility. General guidelines are recommendations and should be followed unless the school meets the requirements in other ways.

These general guidelines are based on the Swedish Education Act and the following UN agreements: Convention on the Rights of the Child, The declaration of Salamanca and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

One ambition was to make a short and informative document, to make the headmasters interested in this special area. The document is not a methodological material and it does not contain detailed information about teaching formats, tactual reading, and different steps in counting with abacus etc.

The aim was instead to raise awareness of the complexity of the learning situation for students with blindness and the pedagogical implications of blindness. Another aim was to make the school aware of what new competence needed and where to get it.

The document begins with an explanation of concepts like visual impairment and blindness according to the World Health Organization, a presentation of the braille code, similarities and differences between braille reading and visual reading.

The general guidelines emphasis the accessibility of the learning environment. Physical accessibility means all indoor and outdoor environments to be available. Social accessibility means that the student should have the opportunity to participate in interaction and communication. Pedagogical accessibility is about the student's possibility to fully take part in the teaching. The general guidelines state that the pedagogical support for a student with blindness always is about teaching and should be given by teachers.

To teach a student with blindness puts high and specific requirements for the competence of the teachers. Therefore, teachers need knowledge about the pedagogical implications arising from blindness in a current teaching situation.

The publication provides examples of areas that the teacher needs to master, for example:

- the braille code and the knowledge of tactual reading
- adapt and make text available
- Manage the student's technical teaching aids.
- Provide visual interpretations.
- Promote interaction and participation.

The document is used by SPSM in talks with the school organizer and headmaster when a student with blindness is going to begin at school. The content is also discussed with teachers at SPSM courses.

The on-going and completed projects in Sweden

Doctoral Thesis in Special Education

Kim de Verdier, psychologist at SPSM-Resource Centre Vision has defended her doctoral thesis <u>Children with Blindness: Developmental aspects, comorbidity and implications for education and support.</u>

The overall aim of the research is to deepen the knowledge about developmental aspects, comorbidity and implications for education and support provision, regarding children with blindness. Special focus is directed towards children with blindness and autism spectrum disorder (ASD).

The research comprises three different projects, reported in five papers. The studies adopt different designs; one is record-based and explores clinical characteristics and etiologies of Swedish children with blindness, one has a longitudinal design with collection of qualitative as well as quantitative data, and explores the school outcome for braille reading students in inclusive education; and one has a mainly qualitative design and explores diagnostic challenges and support to children with blindness and ASD and their families. Both children's, parents' and teachers' perspectives are included in the research.

Project Teach CVI

Teach CVI was an Erasmus+ project during 2015-2017. National agency for Special Needs Education and Schools in Sweden was a part of the project. The National Institute for de Blind, Visually Impaired and Deafblind, Iceland, had a coordinating role in the project. Teach CVI is a partnership that is meant to build a bridge between health care professionals and teachers so they can work together to benefit the target group, children with CVI. It contains material as screening and assessment tools, teaching materials, <u>a website</u> etc.

Denmark

Reflections on the Swedish publication, "Elever med punktskrift som läsmedium"

By Nanette Borges. Head of Department and Bendt Nygaard, Knowledge Consultant, Synscenter Refsnæs

As in Sweden, Danish students with blindness are included in public schools together with sighted students. Therefore, many of the recommendations in the publication about resources and professional pedagogical and didactical knowledge on the consequences of blindness are also relevant in a Danish context.

The publication stresses the legal responsibility that lies with the decision-makers (authorities and principal) to ensure the support that work for inclusion of students with blindness. This focus highlights how important it is that the decision-makers are aware of providing the necessary resources to make it possible for the teachers and students to act out inclusion on a daily basis.

General information and advice about some of the consequences of blindness and the use of tactile reading – including some key efforts to be aware of in order to support the inclusion of students with blindness – are transferable to a Danish context.

Children Braille literacy in Denmark

As in Sweden, we experience difficulties in promoting and maintaining knowledge of and competencies in braille among specialist teachers in Denmark. Because of this, every time a child is diagnosed to become a braille user, an effort is launched to build up braille knowledge and competencies locally around the child, the parents, the daycare and the elementary school. Here the closest decision-makers are the child's parents, the chairman of the daycare, the headmaster and the municipal pedagogical-psychological counselling. Along with the local consultant for the visual impaired Synscenter Refsnæs provides information on how to implement learning and using braille.

Synscenter Refsnæs is working on a publication that contains basic counselling and advice to school authorities. To produce this, we found inspiration in "Allmänna råd" among other sources. The working title is "Brailleguide – Counselling and recommendations regarding braille learning for children and youth with visual impairment". The publication is, as the Swedish publication, aimed at the school authority, but parents, relatives and pedagogues are included in the target group. The target group thus include all actors participating in the establishment of a braille environment centered on the child. Our goal is that the Danish "Brailleguide" will contribute to the establishment of a common frame of reference for all actors connected to the child's acquisition of braille as a tool to read and write.

The greatest challenges and dilemmas for braille students and their families are related to

- The transition from one generation of consultants for the visual impaired to the next, where fewer consultants learn braille.
- The schools do not have the necessary resources to send their teachers on courses in braille and visual impairment.
- A frequent change in classroom teachers.
- The change of school.
- A lack of acknowledgement that it is not just a right, but a necessity to master a written language on the highest level possible. This is important to get an education, communicate with the public authorities and maintain a paid job.

Pre Braille - the early effort

The preparation to braille-reading requires an early effort in regards to the stimulation of the child's tactile attention, motor skills and finger strength, as the Perkins braille machine continues to be the most important tool to braille on paper in the learning stage. Motivation is a key factor, and has to be present in both the child and its environment. A child with blindness must be included in the attention of the linguistic and the natural interest for letters and text, which many sighted children meet and decode in a natural way in their surroundings. In Denmark, during many years the early effort has been focused on pre-braille by marking the

child's toys and other possessions used in everyday life with braille. Parents and local pedagogues receive counselling, special counselling and tailor-made courses from both the local consultant for the visual impaired and an interdisciplinary professional team from Synscenter Refsnæs. In group sessions for parents and children, and in courses for pedagogues from the children's daycare institutions all parties are introduced at an early stage to braille and to tips and tricks on how to create the best conditions for the child's development and learning. Along with a high degree of focus on the application of braille in the child's home and daycare. Knowledge about letters, words and reading is vital for the child's readiness for education. Language is one of the six curriculum in themes in the Danish daycare institutions, where goals for each child is prescribed. Therefore, it is important that the pedagogues have adequate knowledge of braille and tactile illustrations.

Braille and the start of school

The children, who are expected to be braille users are included in the local school or in a local special class, and the schools rarely have the necessary expertise to make sure that the student with blindness has access to education in reading, writing and mathematics with braille as a written language. As mentioned above, knowledge about and competencies in braille and technological aids have to be built locally in the individual schools, when they receive a student, who is or is destined to become a braille user.

Braille and the education of teachers

Before, Synscenter Refsnæs has held courses for teachers and assistants of people with visual impairment and blindness. However, for some years, schools have not used this option. This is most likely because of the structural and economic framework in which the schools navigate. Therefore, Synscenter Refsnæs are now trying out different formats of braille teaching. These formats include a) a local special counselling centered around one or more children in a specific local community and b) as a new initiative, a course for teachers with older students and youth in every region: "Braille user in the classroom, what do I do". The new initiative is carried out in cooperation with IBOS (The Institute for Blindness and Visual Impairment).

Generally, the development of competencies of a responsible level of braille occurs close to the individual student and school. Counselling and education from both the local t consultant for the visual impaired and the specialists from Synscenter Refsnæs are available at the local level.

The use of Braille in Synscenter Refsnæs

Children and youth, who are attending educational and residential living in Synscenter Refsnæs, such as youth school, STU (specially supported education) and residential living are taught braille in the greatest extent possible taking into account their potential of learning.

The students learning potential might be affected by other functional impairments than visional impairment. The braille education at Synscenter Refsnæs receives high priority and is very intensive. Counselling and tutoring from sighted and blind braille experts is at the students' disposal.

Braille and accessible materials

Synscenter Refsnæs has a material production unit, from which schools and consultants for the visual impaired can order teaching material specially designed for students who use braille. The teaching materials often consist of the textbook material that is used in the classroom, in which the student with blindness is included. It is crucial that the braille user use the same textbook material as his or hers sighted classmates to ensure a successful inclusion.

The team in the material production unit mainly consist of graphic designers, who also make national tests and examination material accessible for visual impaired and blind students. In this, Synscenter Refsnæs, the individual school and consultants for the visual impaired cooperates very closely to ensure accurate and timely production.

Biblus - a digital school library

Biblus is a digital school library for students with visual impairment. The library consists of textbooks and other sources in alternative, accessible formats. The materials are produced by Synscenter Refsnæs to be used by students with visual impairment in elementary school. Synscenter Refsnæs provides free access to Biblus for citizens registered in the national sight registry.

The local consultant for the visual impaired supports the teachers and personal assistants' competencies in braille and didactics. They also arrange pedagogic days for the teachers and personal assistants locally in the regions. Synscenter Refsnæs supports this initiative with the participation of our specialists.

When the students starts using digital braille media, Synscenter Refsnæs has courses, which support this development. Besides, we offer a daily counselling hotline to support students and teachers in using the compensatory technological aids. In especially complicated cases, Synscenter Refsnæs can in cooperation with the local consultant for the visual impaired and school provide a "task force" with didactical and technological expertise.



A National course description form The National Board and Social Services

In cooperation with Synscenter Refsnæs among other actors, the National Board of Social Services has in 2016 produced a course description: Children and youth with severe visual impairment 0-18 years.

The course description consists of recommendations on professional efforts, how to organize these efforts and on the cooperation between the different actors around the child and the young - including access to braille and tactile material especially designed for the purpose.

The course description targets employees and managers, who are responsible for and work with children and youth with severe visual impairment in the 98 Danish municipalities.

The course description emphasizes that for blind children and youth, braille is the access to the written language, which creates possibilities for participation in learning, education and independent written writing and the ability to acquire information and knowledge.

The majority of communication with public authorities in Denmark takes place digitally, and thus in written format. This underlines how important it is that blind citizens learn and master braille.

The tactile learning environment is supported by special designed materials and the build-up of competencies in parents, pedagogues and teachers. The effort supports an including environment around the child by creating an understanding of the child's visual impairment and aids among the peers.

The National Board of Health and Welfare recommends a) an early introduction to tactile material during play, special educational efforts and learning, including braille and b) that braille is introduced at the same time as sighted children encounter the written language. The establishment of a braille environment around the child with blindness is necessary both at home, in daycare and in school.

Link to the he national course description

The use of Braille on IBOS

By Tine Hansen, Braille Teacher, IBOS

At IBOS we offer courses introducing braille, both unshortened and shortened, to people who have already learned how to read but whose sight has deteriorated to a point where they no longer can read with their eyes.

In general, our targetgroup (grown-ups) will not ever end up as braille **readers** – meaning they will not be able to learn braille so well, that they can read entire books in braille.

The realistic aim is that they will learn how to:

- Use braille for marking in their daily living (ADL), eg. marking of cinnamons, rechargers etc.
- Use braille to make notes which is necessary when it comes to being a student or having a job

IBOS can help enlighten the ability to learn braille through testing the sense of feeling, memory etc.

When learning unshortened and shortened braille we at IBOS use one of two learningbook systems, both developed at IBOS. In the course we will go through different forms of marking-materials learning the participants about possibilities and showing them the wide range of different materials.

We also teach in reading and writing electronic text using an electronic brailledevice, either a 'smart' device which bear reminders to a computer or a 'stupid' device, which has to be connected to a smartphone/pc with screenreader.

The on-going and completed projects in Denmark

Research in the effects of Neuro Technology Training

IBOS, as the only place in Scandinavia, offers a dynamic Neuro Vision Training, NVT, to persons with a brain damage - often stroke related - that has affected their vision. A research protocol has therefore during 2017 been set up in cooperation with Herlev University Hospital and external reviewers, to measure the effects of NVT. The Ethic Committee has given their accept of the research design. Currently eight persons have passed the trials and entered the program. Approximately a third of those referred from hospitals to take the tests pass the researchers exclusion criteria's.

Danish Eye Doctors have expressed an interest in participation as partners, if we can also set up a control group. We are currently trying to fundraise extra for this, as it prolongs the project, but also make the results more interesting.

Project manager at IBOS: Anne Marie H. Schaarup, occupational therapist and Team Manager, ab7n@sof.kk.dk

Danish Pre-employment Program, PEP

Pre-employment Program, PEP, has been developed and tested by Ph.D. Karen Wolffe in different English speaking countries with good results, so IBOS and the socio-economic company All Ears A/S are adapting the PEP-material to Danish language and conditions.

In May 2018, we were ready to offer the first free trial run for job ready and seeking adults with a visual impairment. Documentation of the nine participant's assessment of their self-efficacy before and after PEP plus their written and oral evaluations show a positive effect so far. The participants will be followed for a year to document their results. Second PEP will take place in Jylland from Nov. 26th 2018 to Jan. 9th 2019, where two more PEP rounds will be offered around the country.

The PEP program consists of 15 special VIP designed one-day modules. The idea is that participants go to work, except that their work in PEP is to prepare themselves to look for work. How to analyze your own dreams and competencies and find out which companies has the interesting jobs, match the jobs to your abilities, decide when to disclosure your disability to an employer, learn what the expectations at a workplace are, build a job seekers portfolio, train and perform a job interview, get feedback, etc.

The purpose of the program is to boost the participants own capability to find themselves a job, so that the number of people with a vision impairment, included in the labour market and who can earn their own income, will increase.

The PEP-project has been founded by the Danish Agency for Labour Market and Recruitment (STAR) 2017 - 2020.

Link to more info on PEP in Danish: www.ibos.dk/pep

PEP project manager: Dorthe Marie Degn, Development and Project Consultant, IBOS, ab8e@sof.kk.dk

Booklet about nervousness at ADL and O&M

IBOS have published a booklet about nervousness for persons with visual impairment when doing Activities of Daily living and Orientation and mobility.

Nordic Visual Impairment Network

NOVIR Newsletter 2018

The publication is in Danish and can be downloaded here: https://www.ibos.dk/fileadmin/IBOS publikationer pdf/Nervoesitet v ADL og 0 M 2108 2018.pdf

Contact information's: psychologist Maria Krøl, maria.krøl@kk.dk (maternity leave until April 2019)

Podcasts

IBOS is currently producing a series of podcast in collaboration with Synscenter Refsnæs and Landsforeningen for Forældre til Blinde og Svagsynede. The aim of all the podcasts is to make relevant professional knowledge available for parents and young adolescents. IBOS is producing 12 different podcasts with different themes as e.g. social competences, the first job and flirting. The podcasts will be uploadet to our homepage and our Facebook-site as they get produced. Please listen with us – and please share!

https://www.ibos.dk/fileadmin/user_upload/podcastkursus_SociakeKompetencer_1506_2018.mp3

IBOS' conferences in Denmark

IBOS will host 1-2 Nordic conferences annually to support the Nordic network and knowledge sharing. The theme is published regularly. We are happy to receive inputs for topics and interesting speakers. Our ambition is to reach a high professional level and give conference attendees useful and innovative tools for daily practice in working with the target audience. So far, the following conferences are in the pipeline:

Vision and brain

Nordic conference on sight and all kinds of brain influences. The items are e.g. Post Commotio, whiplash injuries, stroke, cerebral thrombosis - combined with visual effects. The conference will consist of professional presentations and workshops, and will take place on **September 4**th and 5th 2019.

Vision and inclusion

Nordic conference on inclusion of people with visual impairment at all levels - from kindergarten and education for leisure and work. The conference is set to **September 2020**.

For more information or input, please contact:
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